NEWS ANALYSIS #1-1821 NOVEMBER 15, 1976
RONALD J. DUNLAVEY

TURNING-POINT IN LEBANON?

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE SYRIAN ARMY'S ENTRANCE INTO BEIRUT:

VOICE: IN ONE OF THE MORE UNUSUAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RECENT MIDDLE EAST HISTORY, AN ARAB PEACEKEEPING FORCE HAS NOW MOVED INTO EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF LEBANON BY TAKING STRATEGIC POSITIONS IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL. THE TERM "ARAB PEACEKEEPING FORCE" IS TECHNICALLY CORRECT, BUT IN ACTUALITY THE FORCE IS COMPOSED ALMOST ENTIRELY OF SYRIAN MILITARY UNITS.

THUS COMES TO AN END ALMOST TWO YEARS OF VICIOUS FIGHTING AMONG THE LEBANESE. THE QUESTION THAT NOW MUST BE ANSWERED IS WHETHER---UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THIS IMPOSED CEASEFIRE---LEBANON WILL BE ABLE TO SOLVE ITS INTERNAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND REBUILD ITS SHATTERED ECONOMY.

BUT, BEYOND THAT, THERE IS ANOTHER QUESTION: WILL THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON OPEN THE DOOR TO RENEWAL OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AIMED AT AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT? DOES THE END OF THE SHOOTING IN LEBANON----ASSUMING THAT IT HAS INDEED ENDED---HAVE WIDER IMPLICATIONS? IS IT A TURNING-POINT NOT ONLY FOR LEBANON BUT ALSO FOR THE WHOLE REGION?

THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD SHOULD PROVIDE DEFINITE CLUES ABOUT HOW THAT QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED. BUT IT IS BECOMING APPARENT THAT THE POLITICAL MOOD IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS INCREASINGLY RECEPTIVE TO A RENEWAL OF NEGOTIATIONS. THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THE LEADING ARAB COUNTRIES ARE MOVING TOWARD THE GREATER UNITY AMONG THEMSELVES WHICH SECRETARY KISSINGER ONCE REMARKED IS A NECESSARY PRE-CONDITION FOR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. THE RECENT MEETING IN RIYADH AMONG EGYPT, SYRIA AND SAUDI ARABIA HAS BEEN NOTED AS INDICATING A POSSIBLE

MODERATE CONSENSUS AMONG LEADING ARAB STATES. PRESIDENT SADAT HIMSELF LAST WEEK, IN AN INTERVIEW WITH SEVERAL AMERICAN SENATORS, SAID THAT HE HOPED THE UNITED STATES WOULD REACTIVATE THE GENEVA PEACE CONFERENCE IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-SEVEN. BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION HAVE AGREED THAT A RESUMPTION OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WOULD BE A GOOD THING---ALTHOUGH WASHINGTON HAS CAUTIONED THAT IT MUST BE "CAREFULLY PREPARED".

MUCH, THEN, DEPENDS ON THE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME OF THE UNIQUE AGREEMENT BETWEEN LEBANON'S GOVERNMENT AND THE ARAB STATES---PARTICULARLY SYRIA. THE IMMEDIATE DIVIDENDS FOR THE LEBANESE PEOPLE ARE ALREADY OBVIOUS; THERE PROMISES TO BE, IN THE WORDS OF PRESIDENT ELIAS SARKIS, AN END TO "BLOODSHED AND RUIN." BUT THERE IS ALSO HOPE THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT WILL HAVE OTHER, LONG-RANGE RESULTS FOR THE WHOLE MIDDLE EAST.

-0-